

ON REPENTANCE.

TWO SERMONS.

SERMON I.

Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all the meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.—ZEPH. II. 1-3.

THE first chapter is throughout spent in a most fearful denunciation and description of a speedy and universal consumption decreed against the land of Judah, with the causes of it, which the prophet yet winds up in the words I have read unto you, with a gracious exhortation to repentance, to prevent the execution of that decree.

Wherein consider, first, the persons to whom this exhortation is made. First of all, he speaks collectively as to the whole nation: 'Gather together, &c., O nation,' calling them to a solemn and public repentance; which, secondly, is also to be understood as spoken particularly and distributively to every person in the nation, especially the impenitent: 'Search yourselves, O you not to be desired.' If, thirdly, he can prevail with none of them, he then more especially turns his speech to all the godly in the land, who had repented already, 'which have wrought his judgments;' however, 'seek ye the Lord,' &c.

Secondly, Consider the duties he exhorts them all unto, whereof, though some are more particularly spoken to the bad, some to the good, yet all concern all alike, which as they are laid down in the text, express the parts and ingredients into repentance, and order of them.

1. All collectively are to gather solemnly together; and, 2, being gathered, to search (for so as here anon the word is also to be understood) into the sins of the nation; so also collectively taken, which bring the judgment threatened.

And 2. Every particular person is particularly exhorted: 1, to search himself: 'Search yourselves into your own sins and estate before God;' 2, to judge of yourselves as men not to be desired, that is, out of the favour of God, and to whom his wrath was due, for so God judged of you, O nation not to be desired, and he speaks it to that end that they might judge so of themselves; 3, out of the sense of this to seek the Lord, to

seek his favour, and to pacify his wrath ; and, 4, that they might be sure to find him, to ' seek righteousness' also, grace as well as mercy, else they seek him in hypocrisy ; and, 5, more especially, to seek him in humility and meekness of spirit, seek meekness above all graces else ; and, 6, do all this speedily, ' before the decree come forth.'

And in the third and last place, to stir up all to this, both good and bad, he adds motives.

First, Such as might quicken the bad : as, 1, God's patience was big with a decree, and that decree of wrath ; 2, a set day was appointed for the birth, when it would bring forth ; 3, the child would prove ' the fierce anger of the Lord ;' which, 4, would ' consume them as chaff,' and they not able to resist it.

Secondly, He adds a particular motive to the godly, that in case the day of the Lord's anger come upon the impenitent, yet if they would seek God now they should be hid in it.

In handling of which particulars I have rather chosen to give you the juice and strength of them as strained and concocted into application, and an use of exhortation, as here the prophet doth, than to spend this precious time afforded us in doctrinal discourses.

In which, if I shall be coarse and plain, and not prophesy smooth things to you, consider sackcloth becomes this day, as to pray in, so to prophesy in, as the two witnesses are said to do, Rev. xi. 3.

Speak first, you see here, the prophet doth of, and to the whole nation in the general ; and so I have more especial commission to do this day, wherein every particular congregation assembled is to represent and personate the whole, and take upon them the sins of the whole nation, to confess them as their own, as the saints of old, Ezra and Daniel, did in all their fasts. But more especially we, who are a nation of ourselves (*gens togata*), and as a colony select and culled out of all the corners of it ; and so our sins are as the index of all the sins of the nation, and not only so, but as the original fountain of all the distempers through the whole.

The first thing he exhorts this nation to, is to ' gather together ;' that is (as I have it expounded, Joel ii. 15, 16), ' Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the people,' &c. God will have public penance ere he grants out a general pardon. And gathered together we are this day to this very purpose, so as that exhortation would be out of date, only let us bless the zeal and wisdom of authority, that hath thus gathered us together before the decree bring forth ; for that is the right season of this great ordinance. Preventing physic is best, and so this is here prescribed, and so hath been taken by the saints of old. In the 9th of Ezra, when the people had married the daughters of the nations, and the princes had been chief in this trespass, as soon as Ezra did but hear of this sin he rent his garment, sat down astonished, and fasted and prayed, as foreseeing a storm when such gross vapours ascended : ' For though yet,' says he, ' we remain escaped, yet wouldst thou not be angry till thou hadst consumed us ?' &c. ver. 14, 15.

But to gather together, and to call a general congregation, that is not all the prophet exhorts here the nation unto ; he calls them to a scrutiny also : ' Search yourselves.' The original word, say all interpreters, signifies *searching* as well as *gathering* ; and, say some, these two being conjugate duties, the Holy Ghost therefore concludes both in a word indifferently signifying both ; so as the word being twice repeated, they translate the first *gather*, the second *search*. Searching, which is the beginning of wisdom

and repentance, being the end of fasting. And besides, that the plain and proper signification of the word bears both, so by way of metaphor it bears both also; for repentance, whereof searching ourselves is the beginning, is in Scripture phrase expressed by gathering a man's mind or wits together (that all our life perhaps before have been gadding a preferment-gathering, learning-gathering, credit-gathering, and the like things without us), but then to recollect and call in our thoughts, to 'come to ourselves,' as the prodigal's repentance is expressed, Luke xv. 17. 'To bethink ourselves,' or 'bring back to our hearts,' as the margin varies it in 1 Kings viii. 47, speaking there, as here, of true repentance. So as you see every way they agree both *re et nomine*.

And besides, the motive the prophet useth before and after, makes for this interpretation, which is the only motive I will use to quicken you to this duty at this time, ver. 12 of this former, the first chapter, 'I will search Jerusalem with candles;' and how is that? I will punish, &c.; for judgments are God's bloodhounds, which in the end find sin and sinners out; as in Ps. cx. 15, 'Break thou the arm of the wicked: seek for his iniquity till thou find none;' that is, till there be none of sins left unpunished; and therefore, says the prophet, to prevent God's search, 'Search yourselves;' as 'judge yourselves,' &c.

First, Into national sins; for he speaks to them as a nation: 'O nation not to be desired;' let us search, I say, for if we leave any of Rachel's idols hid in the straw, any of Achan's garments in the stuff, which we would conceal, God will come and search with candles but he will find them out. David inquired of God what national sin brought the famine, and it was found Saul's oppressing the Gibeonites, 2 Sam. xxi. 1; and desperate must the condition of that nation and people be, which, though they themselves 'declare their sins as Sodom,' and their plague-sores run and fester and stink in the nostrils of God and good men, yet, as those that have the plague, they cannot endure a scourge, no, not to have them touched with the tenderest and discreetest hand. And he that would make too diligent an inquisition may fear to be brought into one himself, much more must that nation be near destruction and drawing home when the fatal and deadly sins of it are skinned and healed slightly, as by the flattering prophets of old, till there be no healing, as the Spirit elsewhere speaks.

For this of ours, to search into whose sores and confess them it is that we are gathered together this day; though it be true of us as well in regard of sins as punishments, what Isaiah spake of his in the days of Hezekiah, 'From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, it is full of wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores; the whole head is sick, and the heart is faint.'

Yet search I intend not into the distempers of the head and nerves, of the rulers and magistrates that give motion to the whole body; it is not for this assembly.

And, secondly, indeed search I need not into the outward sores of grosser sins which break out in the body of the people; they are all visible enough to every man's view and conscience.

But the inward corruptions of the blood and spirits; that is, of religion and worship of God, which is the cause of all those other distempers; these I rather desire you to make inquiry of.

First, Because it more properly belongs to this auditory to search into it, who are as the liver and heart, the fountain and cistern of both (for 'the priest's lips are to preserve knowledge, and the people to take the law at

their mouths, Mal. ii. 7); and from us especially have all those veins and arteries their original, which carry and disperse all the corrupt blood and spirits through the whole body of the nation.

And secondly, also because it is the corruption therein which our prophet doth first and principally and in a manner point out in this chapter the first, from the 4th verse to the 7th, and so warrants me to apply what is found like to it to this nation as the object of their search, as the cause why God did not desire them, and the cause of ruin threatened.

For indeed, thirdly, nothing makes Christ to loathe a church that once received pure religion and undefiled from him (as Jesus speaks) as pure blood and spirits, than corruption herein, as you may see by those seven epistles of his writ since he went to heaven, Rev. 2d and 3d chapters, for this is the corruption of the vitals; for the life lies in the blood, and if it be restored and then kept pure, outward blains will soon shale off.

Let us then view the state of religion and God's worship which this our prophet found in Judah, and take we this discovery or direction for us to search ours.

First, Flat and plain idolaters, *ex professo*, we find unpurged out of that state; for which God will 'stretch his hand at the inhabitants, to cut off them who before were not cut short,' ver. 4.

Which idolatry is laid open in three things.

First, In having relics of Baal, idolatrous images, altars and rites for his worship.

Secondly, In having priests also the instruments of it, both *chemarim* (so called from their heat, as *kamar* signifies), their zeal to seduce others, and their activeness to propagate idolatry, as expositors note. And, 2, priests, that is, ordinary chaplains in their houses.

Thirdly, Their idolatry practised in worshipping the host of heaven, and in the night, and so in secret (for the time of it) though on tops of houses.

I shall not need bid you go search for these corruptions; your consciences, I dare say, have had an eye upon popish altars, crucifixes, indulgences (called by some, as here, relics too, but of Baal); upon the Jesuits also more hot than ere the *chemarims*; not seducers only, but incendiaries of the state, such spirits as inflame and make everywhere the blood so hot, as they cast nations into burning fevers, civil dissensions, and the secular priests with them; for the purging of both which, our state wisely hath prescribed bleeding. And their worshipping the host of heaven, the army of glorious martyrs, and saints, and angels, and a badden host also, no man can be ignorant of; for it is practised not as in the night, as with them, but as in the day.

The second sort he instanceth in are not idolaters *ex professo*, but they pretended the same 'reformed religion,' established, they swore, by God; that is, worshipped him (for so you all know swearing by God is put to signify), and yet swore by Malchan also, retaining correspondency with both, and happily endeavouring to reconcile both. Search if you find not those that do so with us, that would jumble light and darkness, by little and little bring in a twilight in opinions first, which the midnight will certainly follow; who to that end revive things left out by our reformers as superstitious, and which ushered in popery at first, and who do it perhaps to symbolise and comply with popery, to make the transmutation the more easy.

The third sort are those that were turned back from the Lord, apostates either in opinion or practice, or truth professed once and acknowledged,

and if in opinion, then in practice; for no man is better than his judgment, many are worse; and opinions that overthrow the practice of religion are worse than the grossest actual sins, by how much an act of treason is less than a law permitting it, or an opinion that it might be lawful. And when men are reduced to prove the first principles laid by glorious martyrs and apostles, it is a sign of great, and high, and irrecoverable fall in some, Heb. vi. 1, 2, ver. 4 compared.

However, if we retain the opinions, yet for the practice of godliness, and as to the approbation of it, 'Evil men wax worse and worse.' Compare but these times with the infant times of our first Reformation; Queen Mary's fires did heat England, and the examples of the blessed men then sealing the truth with their bloods, left behind it a general approbation of their ways, and those duties of godliness which they did profess and practise. Spiritual preaching was then prized; men might go far to hear sermons, and repeat them to their families and be revered. Men might have professed the fear of God in the utmost strictness of it, and have made conscience of their ways and not have been nicknamed; might have pleaded for the Sabbath, and sanctified it in the utmost strictness, spent it wholly in heavenly exercises (as our homilies' words are), and not have been accused of Judaism. But the memory of those godly men and their ways is now worn out, and a generation is come on that know not those Josephs; and now their brethren that worship God after the same way that they did are cried down.

If gross sins be to be spoken against, and sinners punished, men indeed seem to strike, but it is but with a dull and a faint blow with the back of the sword; but if but a hair be to be pared off a godly man's hand, men turn the edge and strike with all their might.

And whereas drunkenness and profaneness, contempt of God and goodness, may pass and travel through the world, having neither passport of law or conscience to secure or countenance it, godliness, under the suspicion of being a factious spy, is everywhere stopped, examined (though it have a passport of conformity to shew for itself), yea, and is sometimes whipped out of town for a renegade.

Nay, is it not, like Samson, brought up upon stages, which are often the devil's pulpits, though under another visor, to make the Philistines sport; yea, set up as a mark to be shot at out of God's place, the pulpit, and puritanism set up as the stalking-horse to stand behind, while they shoot through the loins of it?

Men are not only 'turned *from* the Lord' (as in the prophet here), but turned *against* him.

The fourth and last sort that Zephaniah speaks of are those who were never of any religion, that have not sought God, nor inquired for him, but live in this world without God, as atheists and ignorant persons, that have no knowledge, nor inquire they after any; and civil persons, that neglect calling upon God, and regard not the holy duties wherein he is to be sought; Gallios that 'care for none of these things;' and to search for such in the kingdom were to search out trees in the wood. The whole world is full of them. Nay, rather go and 'run through the streets,' as God bade Jeremiah, Jer. v. 1, 2, and see if you can 'find a man that seeks after God,' in comparison of multitudes do not, or a man who is inquisitive after him in his ordinances, as the church was in the Canticles, chap. v. ver. 6. Nay, run through the corners of the kingdom, you may see thousands of villages where people 'sit still in darkness and the shadow of

death,' and if, happily, they should seek after God, it must be by 'groping,' as Paul says of the heathen, Acts xvii. 27; and indeed how should they! for, as Paul says, Rom. x. 14, 'How shall they call on him of whom they have not believed or known? And how should they know and believe in him unless they have heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? But have they not all heard? Yes, the sound,' as the apostle says. But to ask one question more, 'How should they preach unless they be sent?' I mean to their livings, and reside upon them over the souls of men, in which not men, but God, hath made them overseers. No wonder if Israel be said to be without God, if without 'a teaching priest,' 2 Chron. xv. 2, 3; not a *reading* priest only, but a *teaching*, who may explain the word of life; as a schoolmaster doth not teach a scholar that only reads his lesson to him, but that also opens it. Why, then, is there a want of such ministers to instruct the people? Is it that Christ, who, 'when he ascended, gave gifts unto men, for the work of the ministry,' and not only to convert, and to set in at first, but to build up his saints, Eph. iv. 8-12, hath yet been strait-handed towards this church of ours in dealing out gifts to men, or not to men enough, as labourers to be thrust forth into his vineyard? Or is it that the chiefest fruit of Christ's ascension and main legacies left behind him was bare reading? None of these things can be affirmed without undervaluing both his goodness and the power and efficacy of his ascension. Why, then, it lies on us, that the lights God hath set up, and are full of fuel, oil, and lightsome matter, as learning, gifts, &c., remain *cæca lumina*, or not dispersed, as your lights in your streets are in a dark night fixed in their proper candlesticks. It was one of the first works good Jehoshaphat did, 2 Chron. xvii., first, as to plant forces in all the cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken, ver. 2. So also in the third year he sent both 'Levites and princes to teach through all the cities, and they went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people,' ver. 9. Well, and what was the issue of this? 'Fear fell upon all the kingdoms about, and they made no war,' ver. 10. His garrisons of priests teaching, and princes backing it with authority, were a greater strength and fence to his kingdom than all his subjects; and they will keep a kingdom secure from invasion, for they are the 'chariots and horsemen of Israel,' which in those days were the chief munition, as horsemen and guns are now.

And had we had that care to have fortified every village (in this plenty of able men) which our forefathers took, and wean* from popery, the souls of millions had not been left exposed to the devouring lion the devil, and the Jesuits, who are his janisaries, as they have been; nor should we have needed to fear invasions as now we do, but should have been a terror to all round about us, as they are now to us: and had there not been auxiliary and subsidiary preachers, who have borne the heat of the day, being graciously admitted by authority, who had been swallowed ere now, and yet inquire if some have not cried them down, as they use to do mercenary soldiers, as dangerous unto the church, and that will prove fatal unto the inhabitants.

Neither is this all the cause of our people's not seeking God; but if men preach, yet winnow their sermons, and see how much chaff you shall find among a few corns (it is Jeremiah's comparison, Jer. xxiii. 28). And when men sow chaff, what seed can be expected? or what blessing by dew from

* Qu. 'won'?—ED.

heaven to come upon it? Or if men preach more solidly, yet still passing by the great things of the gospel, the way and signs of faith towards Christ, and repentance towards God, which yet the great doctor of the Gentiles, Paul, makes the sum of all his sermons expressly, Acts xx. 21; and the reason is, because often indeed in these things (even such as was Nicodemus, who was a teacher in Israel) are yet as blind hearers as they were. 'Who so blind as my messenger?' says God by Isaiah, whose name is yet a scer, chap. xlii. ver. 19; so blind, as they judge not of colours; *Color omnibus unus*, as he said, in the dark. And, say they, 'all the people are holy,' Num. xvi. 2, which sends men quick and alive in their own conceits to hell, and with the flattery of universal grace betrays them hoodwinked to destruction; whereas that prophet, that is, 'God's mouth,' is to 'separate between the precious and the vile,' as God spake to Jeremiah, chap. xv. ver. 19; which opinion, where engendered, must needs make men regardless of seeking God, seeing they are told they are good Christians already.

Or, lastly, if they do preach those things, yet not living answerably; 'My covenant,' says God, Mal. ii. 6, 'was with Levi whilst both the law of truth was in his mouth, and he walked with me in equity,' and he then 'turned many to righteousness;' but they being 'departed out of the way, and causing many to stumble,' by ill and slanderous lives, 'therefore I have made you contemptible and base before all the people.' The clergy of England complain much of contempt. See here the cause of it, and all the riches and honour you can clothe and load yourselves with cannot vindicate men from it; but that which makes our steps beautiful and persons honourable, is to preach the gospel, and to live accordingly.

And now, my brethren, to conclude this search, if the blood and spirits in which lies the life of this kingdom shall be found, upon search, thus corrupted and weak, and not having their due motion throughout the whole, we may either give it for dead, or at least fear that the death and destruction (which you see in the like case throughout the chapter he so peremptorily threatens, ver. 7, cutting off all disputes to the contrary, Hold thy peace, &c., says he, against Judah, though as then 'all his meek ones he had in the earth,' as the text shews, were found therein) is not far off our nation. For besides his general rule given, Jer. v. 9, 'Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation?' God hath, and can have when he will, a people that shall bring forth more fruit than we have done; who are also, at the best, but 'branches of the wild olive grafted in,' Rom. xi. 17, in the stead of this nation, the example of which I lay afore you, who were the natural; 'and if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee,' ver. 20. But yet God's 'judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out,' ver. 33, past tracing; for he keeps not always in regard of time and manner the same track of punishment, to shew the depth of his wisdom, as he there speaks.

I have done with the nation, collectively taken.

Let me now turn my speech to every particular person that hears me this day, in the fear of a decreed destruction, as it follows in the seventh verse of the first chapter of our prophet Zephaniah: God having in all likelihood bidden his guests (as he there speaks), who are making themselves ready, and in hopes have devoured us already. Let us, I say, in the fear of this, every particular man come home to himself: 'Search yourselves, O nation;' that is, every man apart.

For indeed this duty of searching is the foundation and corner-stone of

true repentance. Thus Lam. iii. 40, 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.' He that is in the wrong way turns never out of it till by inquiry he finds he is in the wrong, and therefore travellers inquire often of the way, and so should we.

Only then, in the second place, it is and must be a searching of ourselves the prophet calls you to, not to search into the common faults of kingdoms and of the state, to the end to complain of them as many do, and overlook their own. No; it is the prophet's complaint, Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented, saying, What have I done?' but the prodigal, when he repented, 'came home to himself.'

Yea, thirdly, and this is most seasonable and requisite in time of common danger, and when public fastings are enjoined, and when men are called thus to gather together, then to search; therefore both are joined here and in 1 Kings viii. 38, 'If a famine be in the land, or enemy besiegeth, what prayer shall be made by any man' (that is, by any man singly and apart, for you are to pray privately as well as publicly on such an occasion), 'which shall know every man the plague of his own heart' (mark it): 'Then, Lord, hear, O God, and forgive, and do,' &c.

For, first, God hears not the prayers made till then, for the priest prayed and offered sacrifice for his own sins as for the people, Heb. v. 3.

Secondly, God forgives not till then, for God in pardoning he must have the glory of his justice which hath been provoked, and the expense of the riches of his mercy that he lays out in pardoning known and acknowledged sins. He must have a particular reckoning with every man, first, that they may know what their debt is, and what is forgiven; that although God lose the debt, he may not lose his kindness in forgiving it.

Thirdly, Because (as there) God 'gives and doth to every man according to his ways, whose heart he knows;' that is, God, he searcheth your hearts, and accordingly deals with particular men in time of common judgments according to their particular ways; for judgments which you call common yet light upon particular persons. And as in common for national sins, so on this and that particular person according to his particular ways; for a 'consumption decreed overflows with righteousness,' Isa. x. 22; and therefore as, to remove it in common, national sins are to be searched into, so because it lights with righteousness on particulars, every man is to search his own personal sins, and by sweeping every man his own door the street is cleansed, and so the judgment removed. The Ninevites (of whom Christ says they repented at the preaching of Jonah), upon occasion of that public fast proclaimed by their prince, did not only keep a general fast and cried mightily unto God, but that edict it is specially urged, 'Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way,' Jonah iii. 8; and the event was, 'God saw that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil,' ver. 10.

If now you ask what you are to search in yourselves, I answer, into your sins and estates before God; 'Search, O nation not to be desired.' Now it is sin alone that takes God's heart off from us, and that causeth him to have no pleasure in us.

Let every man therefore go home and commune with his own heart, unlock it, and search into all the written evidences and records of his own conscience, which happily have not been looked into since the first writing of them; and to help you to order those confused reckonings, give out to every particular commandment its several bills.

Thou that hast been a swearer, think what a fearful bill the third com-

mandment will bring in against thee, of whom God hath said that he will not hold guiltless for taking his name in vain.

Thou that hast been a Sabbath-breaker, think what a reckoning the fourth will bring in, concerning which God hath given thee a particular *memento*, 'Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath day,' in thoughts, words, actions, which it may be thy conscience puts thee in remembrance also of, and yet thou 'shuttest thine eyes,' as they are said to do, 'from the Sabbath,' Ezek. xxii. 26. 'Take heed lest God swear against thee, 'thou shalt never enter into his rest,' Heb. iv. 8, which, Heb. iv. 9, is called 'the sabbath of the people of God,' *σαββατισμὸν*.

Think what innumerable sins of others, pupils or people entrusted to thee, souls murdered by thy ill example or negligence to instruct them, the sixth commandment will bring in with this foot of the account: 'Their blood' (their souls' blood) 'will I require at thy hands,' Ezek. iii. 18-20.

Think how many stand on the file of the seventh, how many millions of thoughts sacrificed to speculative adultery, if not the fact itself, or man's sin committed, which latter the apostle Paul calls, Rom. i. 24, 'defiling their bodies,' *ἐν ἑαυτοῖς*, 'in or by themselves;' and Oh think how often with this sentence at the end: 'The Lord knows how to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished, especially them that walk after the lust of uncleanness,' 2 Peter ii. 10.

Turn over the vast heap of thy actions, sift them, see how few faithful prayers thou canst find amongst them, how few gracious speeches among as many sins as sands.

Yea, unravel all thy life and untwist each action, and see how many sins in regard of many aggravations are woven but in one.

Go down into the treasury of thy thoughts (as the Scripture calls them, Matt. xii. 35, for the abundance of them and worth in them); think with thyself if they should be melted and tried, as one day God will do every work by fire, 1 Cor. iii. 13; that when all the dross of covetous, proud, adulterous, envious, blasphemous, foolish, thoughts, as Christ musters them and calls them, Mark vii. 21, are abstracted and taken out, how little gold there remains or thoughts of any worth; so Solomon says, 'a fool's heart is little worth,' Prov. x. 20. So feel the pulse of thy desires and affections, of all thy desires, joys, &c., see how quickly and strongly it beats to what is evil, how dully, faintly, yea, not at all to what is good.

Bolt and sift out the meaning and end in every affection, thought, and action, and see how self-love, pleasure, credit, ease, is the *finis architectonicus* that sets all a-work, takes all, and pays all.

Observe what the motives and bribes to gratify self within thee are, which thy heart takes ere it stirs to anything is good.

Trace and scent out all the windings, shifts, and turnings of thy thoughts and inward discoursing to colour over evil.

Lastly, Cast up what thy receipts have been, what wit, learning, good example of other men, light of conscience, motions of the Spirit, tastings of the heavenly gifts, blessed ordinances and opportunities thou hast been made partaker of; and reckon thy expenses for God, and thy trading by these, and what thou gainedst for him by them.

And after you have done this, let the next inquiry be, in what estate you are before God? whether in an estate of favour, which is the thing the prophet puts to their consideration, and search whether to be desired or no; that is, in such an estate wherein God's desire or acceptance is towards thee, and so he speaks of the impenitent in the nation as opposed to the

meek, in three verses, who are in estate of desire and gracious acceptance with God : Cant. vii. 10, 'I am my beloved's and he is mine, and his desire is towards me;' and Eph. i. 6, 'He hath made us graciously accepted;' so as though they have sins that make them in themselves not to be desired, yet God's desire is to them; now that of all other is great controversy, which yet is to be feared, whether thou art in this state of favour with God; few scholars beat their heads about fearing to live in that estate they are afraid to die in.

Now for the decision of the controversy, rest not only in searching the church book, and there finding you are baptized; in Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believes and is baptized,' says Christ, 'he shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.' Suppose he be baptized, whether think you will Christ's words prove true or no? As in Simon Magus they did, God putting no more difference between a Turk and unregenerate man, though baptized, than of old he did between a Jew and a heathen, Jer. ix. 26; the one is uncircumcised in the flesh, the other, the Jew, in the heart; for as not circumcision, so nor by the same reason baptism, doth avail aught, 'but a new creature in Christ,' Gal. vi. 15.

But search you this sacred register of heaven, which is the great inquest of life and death, where all the evidences and indictments to acquit the godly, or condemn the wicked, lie.

And there you shall find that he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, 1 Pet. iv. 1; therefore he that lies in any known sin cannot be saved.

There you shall find if you make credit, or preferment, or anything but God's glory, your end, you cannot believe: John v. 44, 'How can you believe whilst you seek honour one of another, and not the glory which comes of God only?'

There you shall find that flatterers and time-servers are not the servants of Christ: Gal. i. 10, 'If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.'

There you shall find that he who loves not the Lord Jesus, 'he is accursed,' 1 Cor. xvi. 22. And, 'Peter, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep;' you know who said so, he that must judge you also.

There you shall find that he that hates his brother, especially when he makes conscience of sin and duty, that he hates God whom he hath not seen, who gave that law he makes conscience of, 1 John iv. 20.

There you shall find that he that slights and despiseth any of God's commandments and ways appointed him to walk, shall die, Prov. xix. 16.

That he who neglects calling upon God, is a worker of iniquity, Ps. liii. 4, for sinning will either make him leave praying, or praying leave sinning.

Yea, and to make conscience of this not publicly only, but privately, for when a spirit of supplication is poured out, it makes men and women pray apart, as Zech. xii. from 10th verse to end compared.

Yea, and if men continue not to do so constantly, and delight not in God, they are no better than hypocrites, Job xxvii. 8, with 10th verse compared. If a man should take the keys of your heart, and ransack your cupboards, and see what sweet bits you delight in, he should find them full of uncleanness, ease, pleasures, &c., rather than God, and communion with him in his ordinances.

And if upon this search thy estate be found by thee to be unsound indeed, and not to be desired or rested in, be not shy or afraid to judge so of

it, and to pass sentence upon thyself accordingly. For he tells them, God who is greater than your hearts doth so judge of them; that is, think of yourselves as God doth, tune your judgments to his. Which is so far from putting you off from God, as it is a necessary preparation to coming into favour with him; for as he that is a fool must think himself one ere he can be wise, 1 Cor. iii. 18, so he that will be justified must first apprehend himself condemned: Rom. iv. 5, 'He that believes in him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is imputed to him for righteousness.' A man in law cannot have a sentence of pardon until he be first judged, and cast, and sentence passed upon him as guilty.

And therefore it is the greatest kindness can be done you by others, and the greatest wrong you can do yourselves, for others to tell you your estate is good and blessed when it is not, or you not to be apprehensive of the truth herein. For, Ps. vii. 11, it is said, 'God is angry with the wicked every day; if we turn not, [he] hath prepared his instruments of death.'

The next thing in the text is, to 'seek the Lord,' for there is no continuing in that estate thou yet standest in. And thou hast no way to escape but by seeking of him and turning to him.

As that wise king in the parable, Luke xiv. 32, when by consultation he had found that the king coming against him would be too strong, he sends out an embassage and desires conditions of peace; and so must thou from God. Send up prayers day and night as messengers for peace to the court of heaven, and to obtain of Christ, that those great preparations made against thee be stopped; and know that God will be sought too of all those shall have peace at his hands, for he doth not cast pardons away, which cost him the blood of his Son to purchase them, he will have them prized to the utmost. Now that we esteem little worth which is not worth the seeking for, when it is to be had for seeking.

Yea, and so unalterably God stands upon it and looks for this, as that though he hath engaged himself by never so faithful a promise to shew mercy unto his church, yet as Ezek. xxxvi. 36, 37, he says, 'I will; nevertheless, I will be inquired for by the house of Israel for this,' &c.

And he looks not for this only from us, when yet his word is first passed to do it, but he looks for it from his Son Christ on our behalf, to be sought by him, who according to his Godhead is equal to his Father; yea, and of him, who for the performance of those things also purchased all God means to do for us; yet he must ask, yea, in the 17th of John he asks for his own glory he had before the world was. In Ps. ii. 8, 'Ask of me the heathen,' &c., which yet were his own by purchase. Much more therefore he requires this of one that is at that distance from him, who is to him but as the chaff, and wax before the fire, and dust of the balance; as we are creatures, and who besides are enemies to him, until he be reconciled to us, and we to him.

Yea, and he resolves to be sought in earnest unto, not with a faint and a lazy seeking. Luke xiii. 24, 'Strive to enter in, for many shall seek and not be able.' If you get peace of him, you must wrestle for it; *ζητεῖν*, to seek, is too low an expression; wrestle as Jacob did all night, and with all your might too, put to all your strength, yea, use violence, Mat. xi. 12, besiege heaven with volleys of prayers and tears. Jer. xxix. 13, 'They shall seek and find me, when they seek with all their hearts.'

And faith on his graciousness and readiness to pardon, as a foundation of the seeking of him, is absolutely necessary; and such a God thou, upon such seeking of him, shalt find him to be. Do not, therefore, now conceive

him to be of so harsh and furious a disposition, as that there is no dealing with him, no coming near him ; for though he be thus great a God, yet he professeth, Isa. xxvii. 5, 'Fury is not in me' towards one who desires to be at 'peace with me.' And though he be thus strong, yet 'take hold of his strength,' as there, by faith ; and then out of faith pray to him, by prayer seek to him and wrestle with him, and thou shalt have power over him, as Jacob had. 'Then he is gracious ; and he shall pray to him, and God will be favourable, and he shall see his face with joy,' Job xxxiii. 24, 26.

If you ask, What disposition of heart, together with believing, will conduce most to overcome him ? I answer, in the third place, 'Seek to him in meekness,' that is, lowliness and submission. As, first, acknowledging thy deservedness to be destroyed, as they, Ezek. xxxvi. 31, and thy contentedness to be so, if it may more glorify him, which, Lev. xxvi. 41, is called 'accepting' of a man's due punishment, putting a man's self into his hands, and referring himself to him : as David, 2 Sam. xv. 26, 'If he says of me,' says he, 'I have no delight in thee : behold, here am I ; let him do with me as seemeth good to him.' And to be content to wait and attend patiently, 'if at any time,' as saith the apostle, 'God will be gracious to thee ;' and put thy mouth in the dust. And thus God will be sought to humbly, and as a traitor guilty afore God, and obnoxious to him, Rom. iii. 19, that so his absolute free grace may appear and be acknowledged. Ezek. xxxvi. 31, they 'loathe themselves,' or as others read it, 'judge themselves worthy to be destroyed.' And why ? For 'be it known to you, that not for your sakes I do this,' that is, to pardon you ; 'but for his name's sake,' as ver. 22 of the same chapter.

And this is the greatest violence you can use ; it is a laying hold of his strength. Indeed, it overcomes an ingenuous man ; much more God, the 'God of all grace' and mercy. It overcame David, and it was Shimei's policy, as the only way to deal with him, 2 Sam. xix. 20, who, when he saw David would be too hard for him, he cunningly comes and puts himself into his hand. And so Benhadad's servants, knowing 'the kings of Israel to be merciful kings,' advised him their master, when they saw he and they must fall into his hand, to go with ropes about their necks, testifying thereby their acknowledgment that if he would hang them up he might, 1 Kings xx. 31 ; and they came by his chariot side beseeching, and observing his words that fell from him, and waited diligently to see if he would incline to mercy ; and this overcame hard-hearted Ahab.

And thus now go thou to God. Fall down upon thy knees afore him, and with a heart broken to water, acknowledge, as Shimei, thy treason and rebellions against him who never did thee hurt ; and acknowledge, with a rope ready fitted to thy neck by thy own hands, as they Benhadad's servants wore ; that is, confessing that if he will hang thee up, he may. He shall need no other judge to condemn thee than thyself, no other indictment but thine own confession ; and to shew that he needed not to send for thee and hale thee to execution, thou presentest thyself to him. Tell him that he may shew his justice on thee, if he will ; and present thy naked breast, thy hateful soul, as a butt and mark for him, if he please, to shoot his arrows into, and sheathe his sword in. Only desire him to remember that he sheathed his sword first in the bowels of his Son, Zech. xiii. 7, when he made his soul an offering for sin.

Take words unto thyself, as Hosea 'bids, chap. xiv. 2 (he loves to be entreated). That if his end be, that his justice should be satisfied on thee, say, that his Son hath done it, and that more fully than thou ever shalt, if

thou go presently to hell. He may cast thee into prison ; but say, thou art not able ever to pay the debt : so as he may, if he please, lose nothing by thee if he saves thee. Nay, he shall advance the glory of his grace in one that will be ever thankful, and is already sorry for offending him.

Plead for thyself, it is for thy life, that what shall he do in damning of thee, but break a leaf that is broken already, as Job pleads : Job xiii. 25, 'Pursue dry stubble,' as there ; 'chaff,' as here in the text. Say, thou art not a fit match for him to shew his power in.

Urge him, that there are few in the world that do seek him, and if he turn away those that do, he shall have fewer. Who would fear him, if there were not mercy with him. 'Soft words pacify wrath,' Prov. xv. 1, 'and soft tongues break the bones ;' and so a meekened spirit, a heart of rocks ; much more his who hath bowels of compassion in him.

Oh, for God to hear a poor broken soul thus truly bemoaning itself, how doth it stir him, make his bowels work within him ! See what himself says : Jer. xxxi. 18-20, 'When I heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, I remember him still, my bowels are troubled for him.' Every groan went to the heart of him ; if he should have damned him, it would have troubled him all his days.

But withal, you must be sure (which is the fourth) to seek righteousness : both of justification, 'God's righteousness,' as David often calls it ; Christ's righteousness, 'the Lord our righteousness,' as the prophet. A righteousness out of thyself, and laid hold upon by faith, as Rom. 3d, 4th, and 5th chapters, you have urged as being witnessed unto both by the law and the prophets. And truly, that is 'God's strength,' whereby his heart is strengthened to forgive and receive sinners. So in Isa. liii. 1, 'To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ?' that is, Christ, of whom he speaks throughout that chapter. This righteousness, when revealed by an interpreter, Job xxxiii. 23, to a poor soul, and sought by him, and pleaded by him, then God is gracious to him, and says, 'Deliver him, for I have found a ransom,' which this soul seeks me in ; for he will 'render unto man his righteousness' which belongs to him, and was wrought for him to justify him.

Secondly, Of sanctification : For, I say, 'the work of righteousness is peace.' For, so long as thy sins remain, how can there be peace ? And Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord,' &c., but let the wicked man 'forsake his way' ; that is, change his outward converse and course ; 'and the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts,' that is, get his heart changed also to have new desires, purposes, ends, and affections, and 'he will have mercy upon him.' And get a righteousness contrary unto thy former ways and thoughts ; which if you ask, what that true righteousness is ? I answer, 1, that true and new *righteousness in thy heart* thou must seek, is a new bent, bias, and temper of heart, rightly disposing, swaying all the faculties and powers of it, to hate whatsoever is known or suspected to be a sin ; and, on the contrary, inclining them to love and delight in those contrary ways of holiness and righteousness God hath chalked out in his word, and all this for God's cause ; hating the sin, because he hates it ; loving the righteousness, because he loves it. This is that which in your hearts is required ; and therefore to seek it. Secondly, *in life*, is to endeavour to the utmost of a man's strength to yield a constant obedience to all God's commands, and avoid the contrary. To seek after and delight in nothing more than when thou canst avoid sin, and do what is acceptable and pleasing in God's sight ; and to approve thy heart to him, and grieving for nothing more

than failing and falling short in what thou aimest at, and purposest, still having it in thy eye, resting in no pitch or measure of obedience.

And without this, with what face canst thou seek pardon at his hand? For what honesty or equity is there that thou shouldst seek the pardon of thy sin, and yet live in it, or not part with it in thy full resolutions? And then how canst thou open thy mouth to ask at God's hands; or, how to desire the benefit of that all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus Christ to cover thee, and not conform to thy utmost endeavour to be 'righteous, as he is righteous,' as John speaks, 1 John iii. 7, 'purging thyself, as he is pure,' ver. 7, that is, with all thy might and endeavours after it. In Luke viii. 15, the good ground is said to have and to bring forth fruit out of 'an honest heart;' and so must thou have.

Or, secondly, if thou hadst the face to seek him, neglecting this, dost think that God would ever pardon thee? Would a king pardon a traitor, though he sued never so humbly, if he saw he would be a traitor still? Thou wouldst not pardon no man in like case thyself.

If you plead, God hath more mercy in him than is in a man, for 'his thoughts are not our thoughts,' &c., Isa. lv. 8. I answer, Yet still where he expresseth himself most merciful, as in Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, he adds at last, 'yet by no means clearing a guilty'-hearted person, that hath a false and disloyal heart towards him, and will not be subject to him in all things, and be content to have every thought brought to obedience.

And the reason is, because, first, 'there is mercy only with him that he may be feared,' Ps. cxxx. 4. Now if he should suffer pardon to go out of his hand, and no change in men's hearts to fear and obey him, there were mercy with him to be contemned.

And, secondly, you must know that God's mercy is joined with wisdom also; for one attribute destroys not another; but to pity a rogue that continues so, it is foolish pity. God forbids it in us, and therefore will not practise it himself.

Now, till thou turnest from sin, and choosest the things that please him, he will not delight in thee: Isa. lvi. 5, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbath, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant: even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters,' &c. He instanceth in Sabbath, because that day, if sanctified as it ought, in thought, speeches, and actions, is the darling and delight of the Lord, Isa. lviii. 14. Now if thou makest it thy darling day too, and such a day as this of fasting and prayer, or of those ordinances which in his word he manifests his heart is for, if thine be for them also, prayer, holy conference, &c., then he comes to delight in thee, as there, and otherwise not; for 'can two walk together as friends (says the prophet), and not agree?' hating what he discovers he hates, &c.

Therefore, resolve either to leave every known sin, and submit to every known duty; or else never look to find favour and mercy from God.

Now the last clause and condition the prophet puts in, is to do 'before the decree come forth.' There is a space, as Solomon observes, Eccles. viii. 11, between sentence or decree, and the execution of it; and that time is space to repent: Rev. ii. 21, 'I gave her space to repent.' Now what and when God will decree against thee, and serve an execution upon thee, thou knowest not; and thou dost not know what decree is bringing forth, as they know not what is in the womb till it be born: Prov. xxvii. 1, 'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth,' so as thou neither know-

est what nor when an execution may be served upon thee; he may serve an execution of death ere to-morrow; as upon him, 'thou fool, this night;' death's serjeants may arrest thee, and bring thee before the judge; and therefore take our Saviour's counsel, given in the like case: Mat. v. 25, 'Agree with thine adversary whilst thou art in the way, lest at any time he deliver thee to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and he cast thee into prison.' And how near this serjeant from God is thou knowest not. James tells thee, James v. 9, 'Behold the judge is at the door,' and then his officer death is not far off.

But if God should spare thee yet, and let thee live, yet in the mean time an execution of hardness of heart and blindness of mind may be served on thee, as on the Pharisees: John xii. 40, 'He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted.' If not so, yet, which is all one, a decree [may] pass against thee, that thou shalt never have a pardon granted, though thou shouldst sue for it; as against Esau, who, Heb. xii., 'neglecting his birthright,' though he sought to revoke it 'with tears,' he could not; and against the Israelites in the wilderness, against whom 'God swore they should never enter into his rest,' though they lived many years after.

But the most fearful execution of all the rest, which all these tend to, is yet behind; you have it in the text, 'the anger and wrath of the almighty God;' that is, the child which in his decree is conceiving, and is already quickened. Ps. vii. 11, 'God is angry with the wicked every day.' This child strives in his heart every moment, so as he is ready every day to fall in travail, only because this child must have a time fully to be come to its growth, therefore he forbears; yet so as in the mean while he is 'a-preparing his instruments of death' (as there) for the execution of his anger, when his anger shall be brought forth.

And to that end there is a day appointed, 'the day of the Lord's anger,' in the text, which though thou knowest not, yet Ps. xxxvii. 13, God 'sees this day a-coming.' A birth when God's decrees bring forth anger, and thy 'sin brings forth death,' James i. 15, and that then when thou least dreamest of it, 'For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape,' 1 Thes. v. 3. Yea, and it shall be the 'fierce anger of the Lord' also, the longer the child goes in the womb, the bigger. *Fierce*, because 'without mercy,' James ii. 13. 'Judgment without mercy,' called also 'pure wrath' without mixture, because not a drop of mercy to moderate the fierceness of it.

And what art thou this fierce wrath shall cease on? Thou art but 'chaff,' Nahum i. 3. His anger is a whirlwind; a small ordinary blast scatters chaff away, much more a whirlwind. There is no resistance, and if thou couldst resist the whirlwind, yet there it is said to be 'poured out as fire,' which therefore must needs consume thee; and if it rend the rocks, melt the hills, burn the earth, ver. 5, 6, how much more chaff? 'Who can stand before his indignation, who can abide the fierceness of his wrath?'

I should now, in the last place, speak to those that are already truly turned to God, 'the meek of the earth.' And herein the prophet seems to act as one out of hope to prevail with the impenitent; yet seek you, says he, as when that great sin was committed, Ezra ix., though others were regardless of the danger would follow, yet every one that feared the Lord assembled to him, to pray and seek God, ver. 4.

Thus here doth the prophet speak to the godly amongst them, 'seek *you*;' as if he had said, Though others do (according to their kind) go on in hardness of heart, to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath (formerly spoken of by him), yet *you*, who are, and profess yourselves, 'the meek of the earth' (which is the general title given the saints in the Old Testament style, and imports all the whole of religion), upon whose hearts the word useth to take impression, do *you* according to your kind, take and receive this word of exhortation with meekness. Which is,

First, To seek your God, for so in dangerous times he expects you should, and wonders if you do not; so Isa. lix. 16, he 'wondered there was no intercessor' (it was in evil times, as appears by the former verses). God wonders not that wicked men should be so bad, but that his people should be so negligent. What! (says he) have I no children on the earth, that upon such occasions, and such threatenings, use to intercede with me for the nation they live in! Where are my Noahs and Daniels? We wonder at things their not doing according to their kind, as when we see the sun stand still, or fire not to burn, &c.

And, *secondly*, you are to seek righteousness and meekness,* as thereby to condemn and be witnesses against the wicked for God, when judgments come and condemn the rest (as Noah did by fearing God aforehand, Heb. xi. 7), as also to save your own souls; for as nothing but an ark saved Noah, so nothing but righteousness can save you, Ezek. xiv. 14; if Noah, &c., be saved, it is by their own righteousness.

If you say you have done it already, that answer will not be taken, for God, though he acknowledgeth they had wrought his judgment, yet exhorts them the more unto it against such a time as this, when to be saved when the judgment should come would be so great a mercy, to have their lives for a prey in such dear years of life; though God forgot not what they had done, 'ye that have,' &c., says he, forget what was past, and seek after righteousness afresh, as if you had never yet sought any.

And to quicken them to it, he tells them, 'ye shall be filled,* that is, when God comes to burn up the chaff; yet then he will save his wheat, for he will preserve seed-corn to sow the world withal after harvest.

And if it should be asked how it is possible that they should be hid whilst the judgment is in general, consider he hath many chambers of his providence, as Isa. xxvi. 20, 'Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, and hide yourselves till my wrath overflows the earth;' then, when others shall have nowhere to hide their heads, but shall wish the rocks to cover them, ye shall be hid.

Yea, but you will say, this is but half a promise here, and 'it may be.' But now, I had rather have God's *it may be*, than that *and it shall be*, from all the kings of the earth. God loves to speak with the least, and do with the most, to be better than his word, who is abundant in kindness and truth. Now it is not put to shew any uncertainty (see Junius on this place), it is put in a case of a certain promise, and yet withal to shew some difficulty in the performance of it, as when Peter says, 'the righteous shall scarcely be saved.'

And last of all, lest any of his saints should through discouragement or otherwise be slack, as either to think that for their weakness their prayers would do no good, nor prevail with God to remember them in the evil day, or that many particular persons should deem that there are enough besides

* Qu. 'hid'?—ED.

them to seek God, and they need do the less, he therefore bids them all: 'Seek the Lord *all* ye meek.'

And God hath chambers enough to hide you all in, and it must be your own righteousness must prevail for you, Ezra xiv. 14; and besides, he hath need of all your voices; as in elections or great canvasses a voice casts a matter this way or that, so in the great business of the church; therefore, Isa. xxxvii., when 'the children are come to the birth, and there was no strength to bring forth,' Hezekiah goes a visiting for another voice, sends to Isaiah the prophet, as to a man-midwife, to come and help. But you will say he was a prophet, a great saint; know that God often stands upon a number, ten in Sodom, reckoning and counting small and great. The number would have cast it, if of persons righteous. How many ten thousand in England by proportion to this number for Sodom are there we know not; now Europe is a-bringing forth, and so the parliament, and yet they have no strength, therefore come all to help; it was never known that when all the lower house on earth did all petition to God, but they prevailed. 'If two agree on earth,' says Christ, then much more when all. I will conclude all with that in the 3d chapter of this prophecy, ver. 9. God being determined to pour his anger on all the earth, as now it 'may be he hath begun to do, yet he meaning to spare his own in those general calamities, he says, that he 'will turn to them in peace, and they shall all call on him and serve him with one shoulder;' so say I, lift up prayers with pure hands and lips, and do it all of you, and all with one consent, and God will visit you in mercies when he is in the way of his judgments. And so let us do again this day.

SERMON II.

Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all the meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.—ZEPH. II. 1-3.

The doctrine is, that in times when public and common calamities are threatened and feared, God's people should then especially practise these duties mentioned here: 'Seek the Lord,' &c.

This I will demonstrate, *first*, in the general, by Scripture and reason; then, *secondly*, enforce the particular duties, upon particular grounds also.

First, In the general, they are before public judgments to practise holy duties. Because the promise of hiding being made only to the practice of them, as here, and a godly man being only a wise man, for the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy understanding, Prov. ix. 10, this is one main privilege and benefit which he doth and may get by this his wisdom, to 'foresee the evil, and to hide himself:' Prov. xxii. 3, 'The wise man foresees the evil, and hides himself; whereas the simple,' that is, unregenerate person, 'passeth on, and is punished.' For indeed wherein doth wisdom excel folly, and what privilege hath it above it? But in forecasting things to come, by insight into their causes, and so accordingly using means to prevent them if evil,

to attain to them if good. Eccles. viii. 5, 'Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil.' And why? For a wise man's heart discerneth 'time and judgment,' the hints, nicks, and opportunities, the want of which is the great misery of all other men, ver. 6. This want of wisdom in others God complains of, Jer. viii. 6, that they are as a horse that goes on fearing no colours as foreseeing no danger, and so 'rusheth,' as it is said there, 'into the battle;' whereas the stork, and crane, and swallow have an instinct of wisdom to know the times of their removing before winter and cold weather, take their times to build their habitations; but, says God, you 'know not the judgments of the Lord,' that is, foresee not judgments in the causes in like manner to hide yourselves.

Answerably in the 25th of Matthew, at the beginning, though they slept and were secure in the time when the bridegroom was far off, yet when the cry and noise came that he was come, they trimmed their lamps that were wise virgins, and began to set fire to them again. In the 26th Isaiah, verse 9, 'When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.' Now, who are the inhabitants of the world but the meek here in the text? for, Mat. v., they are the meek to whom the promise of inhabiting the earth is made (for wicked men their own place is hell, Acts i. 25); and if any learn righteousness it is they, and if at any time then especially when judgments are abroad in the earth. But to name no more places, to enforce this by reason.

First, Consider the chief end which God hath in threatening and sending public calamities on the world is to purify and make his own better and fitter for heaven, to put them upon seeking him and seeking righteousness. As the winter and cold winds are sent for the good of the corn and herbs as well as the sunshine days in summer and spring, so the winters of calamity which the world hath successively after days of peace and prosperity, are for the bettering of his own people; for 'the world is theirs, things present and to come,' 1 Cor. iii. 22. Winter chokes the weeds, mellows the heart of the earth, and so furthers the rooting and growth of the corn. The winds purify and fan the air, and cause the flowers to cast forth a pleasing smell. So in measure doth God deal with his, Isa. xxvii. 8, when first the seed begins to bud forth; and though he stays the roughness of the winds and storms that might blast, and kill, and destroy grace in them, in the same verse, yet debate with them he doth in measure. And his end is to purify them: 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;' yea, and this is all his end, this is all the fruit, to take away the sin. And so in Dan. xi. 35 those heavy storms which there befalls the world are but to purify and make white the wise: God's laundresses, to wash away their filth, and whiten them as men hung out and wetted to be whited by it. And as he sends not the rain of his word in vain, Isa. lv., it returns not empty, but accomplisheth the ends for which he sent it, so nor shall these storms, but he will have his end in this blessed effect of learning his people righteousness ere he hath done; they bring forth the quiet fruit of righteousness in the end in and to them that are exercised thereby, Heb. xii. 11. Now, if this then be God's end, which he will bring about ere he hath done, our duty is to prevent him in it, and take out this lesson, and then therefore especially to seek him and his righteousness, and make it our especial aim and business. For otherwise we despise God in his judgments threatened, because they lead to this end, and are appointed to it; even as they do that despise his mercy, Rom. ii. 4, 'which leads to repentance.' And so instead of

treasuring up mercy against that evil day, whereby we might be spared, we shall treasure up wrath.

Secondly, Besides that it is God's direct end and most principal, when he brings them thus, to learn their righteousness. So to avenge their quarrel as well as his own, and the wicked's misusing of them, yea, and for their sakes he forbears a long while, and puts up many wrongs wherein he could have righted himself immediately. And this must needs be a further engagement to his own to learn and seek more righteousness in and against such times: 'Destroy it not for their sakes,' Isa. lxxv. 8. He forbears the principal long for them, loseth much glory he might presently recover, therefore they had need pay use in the mean time to keep off the suit; to bring in the more righteousness daily, and then seek and gather up more to pay him when the bond is like to be presently sued; a decree coming out with an execution. And as that he thus forbears is an engagement, so that his coming to judge at such a time is to avenge their cause, is much more. Now, that he doth so is evident, Deut. xxxii. 35, 36, compared, where to be revenged on his enemies is to judge his people, which as in the next words is interpreted is to judge for them, and for their sakes; 'he shall repent for his servants;' and so it is called also pleading their cause, and taking vengeance for them, Jer. li. 36. Have they not reason then to take part with him, when he comes purposely to take part with them; to walk in righteousness more especially then with him, when he comes to judge with righteousness for them; to fight his battles when he fights theirs; to remember him in their ways, when he cometh to make inquisition for their blood and wrongs, remembering them? Ps. ix. 12.

Thirdly, If it were God's end only to avenge his own cause, yet then they are to be called forth as his witnesses, and so to join with him in condemning the world in time of public visitations; therefore, Rev. xi. 1, 2, they are called witnesses that, ver. 6, do join with God in smiting the earth with plagues; and as at the latter day, the day of the great visitation, they by their works are to glorify God, and witness that the wicked's condemnation is just, 1 Peter ii. 12, and so judge the world, so in days of lesser and more particular visitations also. And so Noah, by fearing and believing God, and preparing an ark beforehand, condemned the world, Heb. xi. 7. God must have some to justify his proceedings; now, he hath none but you: Isa. xliii. 12, 'Ye are my witnesses;' now, if ye should be as unjust and unrighteous as they, as guilty, and negligent, and secure as they, and had as little sought God as they, and his righteousness, ye were disabled to be witnesses then. With what face could you do it? They might except against you justly. And how could God take your testimony if so obnoxious as they? *Testimonium qui dat, habeat*, says the law.

Nay, fourthly, he must otherwise be forced to cut you off else with the wicked, for he cannot spare you of all others, you having known his name, Amos iii. 2; for he, though a Father, yet judgeth 'without respect of persons,' 1 Peter i. 17; and if there were not a great, broad, and evident difference between you and others, he would seem to be a partial and indulgent Father, which he forbidding and punishing in others, as old Eli, will not be guilty of himself; yea, and therefore judgment takes hold on his own house, nay, it begins there; therefore he is fain to teach his own by chastising them beforehand, Ps. xciv. 12-14, that when he comes as the judge of all the world to execute vengeance (ver. 1, 2 of that psalm), he may then spare his own, and they rest in the day of trouble, ver. 13;

that, as the words are, 'God may give him rest in the day of trouble:' that is, with justice and equity may do it. And the reason given in the 14th verse is, because God hath a mind to spare them and not cast them off, therefore in wisdom and mercy he corrects them and teacheth them out of the law, until the pit be digged for the wicked; as also 1 Cor. xi. 32, therefore 'we are chastised, that we should not be condemned with the world,' but hid and preserved when others are destroyed.

Fifthly, If he should spare you; yet otherwise, you should not be fit men to intercede for them, which yet is your duty and honour, for you are his remembrancers and watchmen, Isa. lxii. 6, intercessors, Isa. lix. 16, such as God seeks out and would fain find ere he destroys, Ezek. xxii. 30. Now it is righteousness extraordinarily sought that only can ingratiate you so far with him as to give you the lives of others, as he did theirs to Paul who were in the ship with him; not ordinary courtiers, but especial favourites they must be who prevail so far, men greatly beloved, as Daniel was; if you deliver the island, it must be by the pureness of your hands, Job xxii. 30.

First, To seek the Lord; and seeking having reference and relation to finding, Isa. lv. 6, thereby must be understood the practice of such acts of the soul as whereby God's favour is won and obtained against the evil day, and because that it is made a distinct thing from seeking righteousness, &c., whereby also God's favour is to be obtained; therefore seeking the Lord I interpret to be meant those inward immediate acts and dispositions which are more immediately terminated upon him, and whereby we do ingratiate ourselves with him; and then to seek righteousness is to practise the duties of repentance and new obedience, whereof meekness is a particular branch, more especially needful to times of judgment.

Now those acts of the mind which have God for their immediate object requisite at such times, are,

First, To take him for your portion and refuge; and so all saints have done upon such occasions in a more especial manner; so did David still when he was in any distress.

And so the church, when under the greatest pressures that ever; in the third of Lamentations, from the beginning to ver. 17, 'Yet still the Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore I will hope in him. The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him,' ver. 24, 25.

And so the church, when she was beset about with briers, and every man was as 'a thorn in her side,' Micah vii. 4, therefore, ver. 7, she resolves, 'I will look to the Lord;' seeing I can have comfort in none of my friends, I will look to him.

And so Jonah in the whale's belly, when the weeds were wrapped about his head, and the waters came about him, so that he thought he should have died no other death: 'When my soul fainted within me,' Jonah ii. 7, 'then I remembered the Lord;' and 'they that observe lying vanities,' ver. 8, and seek to other shifts, at such times they 'forsake their own mercy;' they leave, as those with Paul would have done, the ship in a storm, and commit themselves to a cock-boat, that every wave overturns.

God is worth something at such a time as this; for be thou in what place thou wilt, or in what distress soever, he is a very present help in trouble: Ps. xlv. 1, and 'if I be in the ends of the earth, I will cry to thee when my heart is overwhelmed,' Ps. lxi. 1. And though 'my heart hath often failed me,' says David, yet 'God never failed me,' Ps. lxxiii. 26, nor never will. And 'he is a Rock that is higher than I,' says Ps. lxi. 1; and if I

could but get up on him, though the waters would soon drown me that am but weak and low, I am soon overborne, or at least soon overwhelmed; yet he is a Rock, and an high Rock; so high as that when the overflowing flood and waves of great waters come, 'they shall not come nigh thee,' Ps. xxxii. 6; when mountains and great men of the earth are covered with waves, carried into the sea, covered and overborne, Ps. xlv. 2, 'thou shalt be safe.'

On the contrary, if thou beest in a parched land, where no water is, as David elsewhere speaks, Ps. lxxiii. 1, yet there, 'he that trusts in God, and whose hope is in the Lord,' as Jer. xvii. 7, 'he shall be as a tree planted by water, and spreads out her roots by a river, and shall not see when heat comes; but its leaf shall be green, it shall not be careful in the year of drought, nor cease to bring forth fruit.' All other trees, whose roots are shot into dry earth only, they must have rain from without to keep them green, else in a year of drought they wither and die; and so that man that makes flesh or a creature his arm, ver. 5, whose souls and the affections of them are shot only into riches and honours, &c., as the soil they live in, if there be a drought without, a want of earthly comforts, they are like the heath in the wilderness, ver. 6, for they want moisture; and so all the joy and frolicness, which is their leaves and fruits, withers and dies, and falls off. But now a tree that is rooted by a river that never dries up, and thence the root secretly doth draw sap and juice, regards not drought above ground. So now a godly man, whose soul and all the faculties of it are shot and rooted in Christ, the spring of all comforts, and God of all consolations, sees not or feels not when heat cometh, viz., persecution from without, that dries up all others' moisture. Such soul is not careful in years of drought, though there be a decay of outward comforts; for there is a secret river runs by its root continually, 'a river which makes glad the city of God,' Ps. xlv. 4; and though Euphrates may be dried up, as it was when Babylon was taken, Jer. li. 36, yet this river can never, because it springs up to eternal life, and no enemy can ever sever these streams from that spring; yea, and though the hogs of the earth may root up other trees, the Spaniards may root you out of your pleasures and riches and houses, yet what God hath planted in his Son shall never be rooted up, as the opposition shews, Mat. xv. 13. 'But my vineyard and the trees therein, I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it, I will keep it day and night,' Isa. xxvii. 3.

Therefore choose God, and take him for thy portion aforehand, for when the evil day comes else, thou wilt be sent to the things you delighted in, as they: Jer. ii. 28, ver. 27, 'In time of their trouble they will come to me,' says God, 'but where are the gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble,' ver. 28. 'Wherefore plead you with me? whom you have transgressed against all your days,' ver. 29.

Secondly, Trust perfectly in him; that you shall find in all the places quoted the consequent of making him their portion. Wait for mercy from him, cast thyself on him for relief; live by faith, trust perfectly on the promises made, and the experiments of his former dealings with his people at such times as these; it is the only way to quiet your minds. See the counsel given the church, and what the church did in such times as these: Isaiah xxvi. 4, 'Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;' not strength only for the present, but which never decays. Other things may strengthen the heart a while, but he for ever.

He is a rock, and a rock of ages; and, ver. 5, this motive is added, 'Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed on thee:' so as a soul that rests itself in Jehovah, and hath cast anchor there, shall be at peace, and at perfect peace, when all the world is at war about thy ears. 'According to thy faith be it to thee.' If thou wouldst have perfect peace, then trust perfectly, as Peter says; for if thou beest strongly settled upon him as thy basis, they must shake him ere they can shake thee. Ill tidings, that make the hearts of hypocrites appalled, as Isaiah xxxiii. 14, yet shall never move him; 'he shall not be afraid of evil tidings,' Ps. cxii. 7; for why, 'his heart is fixed' (it is pitched upon all good it looks for; hath got a standing), 'trusting in the Lord.'

Now, in the same 26th of Isaiah, at the 8th verse, what doth the church answer to this? Why, 'In the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee.' Though God be never so angry, and come out as a judge, yet one that trusts in God dares stand in the way of judgments, looks for mercy from him then. In Isaiah lxiv. 1, when God did terrible things, ver. 3, and was wroth, ver. 5, yet then he that rejoiceth in him, and works righteousness, meets him, and remembers him, and so trusts in him in his ways; for 'all his ways are mercy to them that keep his covenant,' Ps. xxv. 10. He is never out of the road of mercy unto them. So as the church says, Isaiah viii. 17, I say, and his disciples, ver. 16, say, 'I will wait upon the Lord, that hides his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him;' that is, when he looks in wrath upon all else, yet then I will look he should be merciful unto me, as he promiseth, ver. 14, that he would be a sanctuary to them, when a snare to all else.

Therefore trust him, and trust him perfectly. Go, study all the promises, this in the text among the rest; distil the juice and comfort of them all, drink them down. All that ever he promised to his people, or hath done for them, were written for our comfort. There is not a promise but it is a tried truth; and still in all ages, upon all occasions, God's people have found the faithfulness, and purity, and soundness of them, that there is no flaw or dross in them; which is David's meaning, when he says as often in the Psalms, 'The words of the Lord are pure,' and 'tried;' still he speaks so of the promises of deliverance from danger; as in Ps. xii. 6, which was penned in shewing the oppression of godly men in Saul's time, who persecuted the godly, killed the priests, and exalted the vilest men: ver. 8, 'Now I will arise, says the Lord, I will set him in safety,' ver. 5; and what is David's gloss on this promise? Ver. 6, you may trust him, says he, for 'the words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times;' that is, still in all straits and difficulties, even in the fire, God hath made good his word.

They have been tried again and again. Abraham tried them; 'in the mount the Lord will be seen.' Jacob, he tried them, when he was in a strait, Gen. xxxii. 9, and he found them true. So David fell often, seven times; yea, seventy times seven times. There are so many *probatum est* to them, that thou mayest build upon every one of them.

'A friend,' says Solomon, 'loves at all times,' Prov. xvii. 17, 'and a brother is born for adversity.' Now God hath been a friend to thee from everlasting, and all those *sacula* have not worn it out; and is nearer than a brother, as tender as a mother, Isaiah xlix. 15, and thou 'art graven on the palms of his hands, and thy welfare is continually before him,' ver. 16, and 'remembered with everlasting kindness,' Isaiah liv. 8. He never had his mind off thee, and dost thou think he will forget thee for a little adver-

sity? No; he should not be a friend then. Now is all the trial of him; he will not fail thee in thy greatest need. Therefore, says David, 'Trust him at all times,' Ps. lxii. 8, for 'God is a refuge,' and that especially in the evil day: Jer. xvi. 19, 'O Lord, my strength, &c., and my refuge in the evil day.' The chiefest use of him lies then, and if it were not for that, we were in worse case than others, for all our hopes are in him, as Jer. xvii. 17, 'Be not a terror to me,' says Jeremiah to God, 'for thou art my hope in the evil day;' all the hope he had. He were undone if he should find him look aloof off from him then. No; then is the blessedness of a godly man seen: Ps. ii., 'If he be angry, then blessed is he that trusts in him;' then especially.

And if he seem never so angry, yet trust him, for he means thee no hurt: Jer. xxix. 11, when they were carried into captivity, they thought he meant to destroy them; nay, says God, be not jealous of me, 'I know the thoughts that I think towards you; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end;' as good an end as you can look for, if you but let him alone, and do his do.

And this is the strongest motive to move him to be merciful to thee, for thereby thou becomest his guardian,* his pupil, and he is engaged to take the tuition of thee. It is against the law of nations to betray those that fly for succour to us. In the captivity of Babylon, says God to Ebed-melech, Jer. xxxix. 18, 'I will surely deliver thee, and thy life shall be given thee for a prey; because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord.' That is all the reason; and so Isaiah xxvi. 3, 'Because he trusts in thee.'

Only, in the third place, carry thyself fearful of offending him; which is another way to win his favour, as indeed the best of you have cause to do: in time of judgments, Rev. xv. 4, 'who shall not fear thee?' For he is a Father, who without respect of persons judgeth every man 'according to his works,' 1 Pet. i. 17; therefore fear.

When Uzzah was stricken for that small and but rash act, as the Holy Ghost himself acknowledgeth it, 2 Sam. vi. 7, it is said of David, that he was afraid of the Lord that day, and thought with himself, how shall the ark of the Lord come to me, that am as sinful as Uzzah, and committed many a worse error, not rashly, but presumptuously. So when thou shalt see God come out of his place with fury, to punish the inhabitants of the earth, because there is wrath; as they say to Job, 'Beware lest he take thee away with his stroke,' Job xxxvi. 18; that is, whilst thou lookest at thyself and thy obnoxiousness. It is good to fear; it is a sign of stubbornness if thou dost not. If children see their father beat but the servants, if they fear not, it is a sign they are stubborn children.

And to fear is a means to prevent thy being stricken in thy particular. If shaking the rod works awfulness, God loves not to strike; and therefore in Hab. iii. 16, when he saw pestilence and sword a-coming as God's harbingers; says he, 'I trembled, that I might rest in the day of trouble.'

Only this, 'Fear not their fear,' as God says, Isa. viii. 11, that is, not punishment only, but fear to offend, fear sin. 'Sanctify God in your hearts, and let him be your dread; fear him in all your ways.' To fear punishment only is not to sanctify him. My brethren, take heed of walking rashly now in these times, that is, hand over head, as not caring what you do, as Levit. xxvi. 40, which is translated 'walking contrary,' and is read by others, 'walking rashly,' not much minding what he doth. It be-

* Qu. 'ward'?—Ed.

hoves you to look about you, always walking circumspectly, lest for want of taking heed you grievously offend God ere you are aware; take heed, for God will walk rashly to such, strike a rash stroke as it were, and cut off even one otherwise dear to him, as it were unawares; because there is wrath, take heed lest he take thee away by his stroke.

Fourthly, Make him now the end of all thy actions, more than ever: Rev. xv. 4, 'Who will not glorify thee' when thy judgments are made manifest, 'for thou only art holy;' and this holiness of his God manifests in his judgments, as much as in any other works; and his end when he comes, is to glorify himself of those that would not do it aforehand, to recover his glory of men that regarded it not. Ezek. xxviii. 22, 'Behold, I am against thee, and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: when I shall have executed judgments.' And therefore you had as good give glory to him beforehand, as Jeremiah says, chap. xiii. 16, 'before he cause darkness;' for God will be glorified either on you or by you, for he made all things for himself. All things are by him, therefore for him; and if therefore he get nothing by you, nor you pay your rent, look to be turned out. Are you such vines that bring forth fruit to itself, as Hosea x. 1, so as God gets nothing done for him, eats not of the tree he planted, he stubs it up, why cumberst it the ground? Especially look to yourselves when God's axe is lifted up and laid to the root of the tree; now down with all unprofitable ones, not only those that do not bring forth fruit, but that do not bring forth fruit to God, Rom. vii. 4, that bring not forth fruit 'meet for him that dresseth them, and rains on them;' as Heb. vi. 7, he that doth not is 'nigh to cursing,' and so to burning.

But now, a soul that is a fruitful soul, and desires in all things to glorify him, and to bring forth much fruit, and that to him, it were not for his profit to do it; nay, God should be a loser if he should cut him off, as Deut. xx. 19. What, cut down a tree that is full of fruit, and that not ripe yet? No, he will not. God will not 'sell his people for nought, and not increase his wealth by their price,' as they plead, Ps. xlv. 12. He may get more by them, and let them stand. Nay, see what God says, Ps. xci., when 'thousands fall besides thee,' &c., why, says God, ver. 14, 'because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him.'

Yet, fifthly, pray to him, and call upon him, and keep communion with him, which indeed is more especially and particularly put for to 'seek him;' and is the next condition required in that Ps. xci. 15, 'He shall call upon me, and I will answer him,' which hath three parts, first, 'I will be with him in trouble,' secondly, 'deliver,' and thirdly, 'honour him.' He will answer thee, first, by being with thee in thy trouble, manifesting his presence; and what if thou beest in the fiery furnace with the three children, if God and Christ walk with thee. Now thou hast his promise as well as they, I will be with thee in the fire, Isa. xliii. 2, and in waters; be with thee as a friend, bemoaning thee, and bearing the burthen with thee, which is a great ease to a man. Isa. lxiii. 9, be with thee, and tender thee, and visit thee, if sick, or in prison, &c., to bring thee cordials and refreshments, as Ps. xli. 3, to 'make thy bed in thy sickness, and strengthen thee when languishing.'

And as he will be with thee, so he will plot to deliver thee, and not rest till he hath done it; and not only so, but bring thee out, as Joseph, out of prison into greater honour, or as Daniel, out of the lions' den.

And this he would do, if men would seek him, and preserve communion, and be much with him, as the church did, Isa. xxvi. 8, 9, 'in the night

sought him, and sought him early, when his judgments are in the earth.' 'When I awake,' says David, 'I am still with thee,' Ps. cxxxix. 18, yea, and all the day long he kept communion with him: Ps. lxxiii. 23, 'I am continually with thee,' and do walk as in thy presence, and dare not suffer my heart to go far from thee; for I am not able to subsist unless thou holdest me by thy right hand, especially not then when waves of trouble come; then, unless he hold thee, how wilt thou do? as Peter, if Christ had not put forth his hand. Therefore keep nigh him, still have him by the hand; for the Lord says, verse 27, 'Those that are far from thee shall perish,' else, when troubles come, I am in a miserable case. Ps. xxii. 11, 'Oh be not far from me, for trouble is near,' for there is none to help, none else; and therefore if thou wouldst not have him far off thee, then walk not aloof of him now. Oh, 'it is good,' says David, verse 28 of the same 73d Psalm, 'to draw nigh to God,' that is my best and only way for safety, and therefore seek him and follow him hard, as David: Ps. lxiii. 8, 'My soul followeth hard after thee,' as one not willing to lose sight of him; follow him up and down, give him no rest night nor day. It is not enough to trust him and fear him, but pour out your hearts before him, Ps. lxii. 8, 'for he is a refuge for us.' And to strengthen their faith and quicken their prayers, I have heard it spoken again and again, that power belongs to him, and mercy belongs to him; that he is able, and merciful, and therefore willing to do abundantly above all we can ask or think; and therefore it is not in vain to seek him, and to trust him.

And this God expects ere he delivers you. In Jer. xxix., he had promised to keep them safe in the captivity, yet he bids them pray to the Lord for it, verse 7, and that after seventy years he would return them, verse 10; yet says he, 'You shall go and call upon me, and pray to me, and I will hearken: yea, ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall seek for me with all your heart,' verses 12, 13.

And so much for seeking the Lord.

The second general head commended to the godly, is, 'seeking righteousness,' which is meant of righteousness of justification, which is called 'the righteousness of God,' that is, of Christ. It is most necessary to get assurance of that, and to get your conscience sprinkled with his blood, as the doors of the people of Israel were with the blood of the Lamb, and so God passed them by when he destroyed others; for that pacifies the wrath of God only. Isa. xxxii. 1, 'Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, &c. And a man,' namely, Jesus Christ, 'shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest; as rivers of waters in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,' to shelter thee, and cool thee, and cover thee from God's wrath, when he rains down snares. 'Kiss the Son,' as well as the Father, 'lest ye perish,' Ps. ii.

Or, secondly, if meant of the righteousness of sanctification, it is also needful to practise the duties of repentance and new obedience more than ever; for 'overflowing, it shall overflow with righteousness,' as he said, Isa. x. 22, Ezek. xiv. 14.

As, first, to turn from sin, put a stop to that, for this is that which makes God angry, Isa. xlii. 25. Why is Jacob given up to spoil, and God's fury burn as fire? Is it not because they have sinned? Sin is the fuel of this fire, and makes a man tinder to a judgment, that the least spark take presently.

And, secondly, the end why God afflicts us is, to take away the sin. Isa. xxvii. 7-9, 'By this it shall be purged;' therefore, make use of lesser

afflictions aforehand, as purges to work it out, that God may not be provoked to give a stronger, both to take away the humours and purge also. You see that is all his end to take away sin ; this is all the fruit. Do it aforehand, and you prevent him.

And if you will not take your sins away, know God will take you away, for cleanse a land at one time or other he will, Ezek. xxiii. 48. At the 47th verse, they should be stoned, &c., and ' thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land.' If you will not cause it to cease by severing it and your persons, God will take the persons themselves away, so to purge the sin away. And so, Isa. xiv. 23, if they would not sweep their hearts themselves, but let heaps of filthy thoughts, speeches, desires lie, I will come with my besom, and cleanse all for you ; but it shall be ' the besom of destruction.'

Let every man, therefore, put a stop to sin ; as they reasoned, 2 Chron. xxviii. 13, have we not sin enough already ? Especially preserve thyself from the sin thou art most addicted to, whether by custom or inclination, be it a disposition of pride, worldly lusts, uncleanness, idleness. As David in the 18th Psalm, which he makes in the day that he was delivered from all his enemies, as appears by the title ; and vers. 17, 19, ' He delivered me from my strong enemy,' &c. ; and why ? because he kept close to God, did not wickedly depart from him ; if he did, it was weakness rather than wickedness ; ver. 21, I have put away none of his statutes, and ' I have kept myself from my iniquity.'

And so the king of Nineveh, Jonah iii. 8, bade the people turn every one from his evil way ; and because oppression was the chiefest sin, he mentions that : violence in their land. And God delivered them you know.

Worldliness and unjust dealing, and seeking riches, and honours, and great things, is, of all other, the most vain at such times as these ; whenas thou knowest not how soon it may be all one with the buyer and the seller, as Isa. xxiv. 2, that is, both have a like bargain, for the enemy comes and takes away both. And ' dost thou seek great things for thyself ?' says Jeremiah to Baruch, Jer. xlv. 5, projecting great matters, when I am a-rooting up all things in the land. ' Is this a time,' as he said to Gehazi, 2 Kings v. 26, ' to receive vineyards ?' &c.

Take heed, also, of being drowned in sensual lusts and pleasures, surfeiting and drunkenness, Luke xxi. 34, Mat. xxiv. 38 : ' They ate and they drank, and the flood swept them away ;' for they make a man secure, presumptuous, more unfit and unwieldy to suffer.

Keep yourselves also free from the sins of the times ; if you mean to be free then, ' partake not of their sins, lest of their plagues.' This was the lesson that God taught Isaiah : chap. viii. 11, ' God instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people.' It was when God threatened the Assyrian to come in ; and having care of his people, he bids them seal that, ver. 16, among them, not to be carried with the stream of times, and then ' I will be a sanctuary' unto them.

What corrupt practices in state, what corrupt opinions do men raise up, free yourselves of them. If they say a confederacy, an unlawful league or peace, say not thou so ; but go to God, and there give your voice at least against it. Indeed, in an evil time a prudent man is fain to be silent, as Amos v. 8, to man namely ; but go to God, and complain to God, and mourn for them, and so thou shalt wash thy hands of them, 2 Cor. vii. 11.

How did Lot wash his hands of the sins of Sodom ? He was vexed at them, 2 Pet. ii. 7, and God delivered him. How did the people of Israel

clear the land of murder, when it was not known who did it? Deut. xxi. 6, 7. The priests should slay a heifer, and wash their hands of it: We have not shed this blood, &c., and so put it away.

Not only mourn for, but intend your zeal against, the sins of the times and places you live in, so far as your callings do extend. For because that Jeremiah (and his remnant) was a man of contention against the sins of those times, &c., they 'cursed him,' Jer. xv. 10; therefore the Lord said, ver. 11, 'Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; and I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and affliction.' Even so it seemeth just and good to our good and wise God, that when he recompenseth 'tribulation to them that trouble you,' then to give 'rest to you that are troubled,' 2 Thes. i. 6, 7, as the apostle there speaks in another case; and because we contend for God with the enemies of his glory, therefore the enemies of our peace shall deal well with us.

And indeed, if ever godly men's zeal and valour for the truth was to be quickened and stirred up, it is most at such times as these. For now, God himself begins to be zealous, and his displeasure against sin to wax hot. In Isa. lix. 13-15, when God saw nothing but 'oppression and departing from God,' and 'judgment turned backward,' that 'truth was fallen in the streets,' and that 'equity could not enter,' 'the Lord saw it, and it displeased him,' vers. 15 and 17; he 'clad himself with zeal as with a cloak,' coming forth to repay them according to their deeds, ver. 18. When, therefore, we see like times, and that God begins to take up his cloak, to come abroad into the world amongst us in fury and displeasure, we should sympathise with him, and be affected as he is, as courtiers are with their kings.

So Moses, Num. xi. 1, 10, when the people murmured, and it displeased God, ver. 1, and his anger was kindled greatly, the text adds, 'and Moses also was displeased.' For this is a general rule given, 1 John iv. 17, that as God is in this world, so should we be, to behave ourselves in the exercise of the same moral virtues that he doth exercise, as to shew forth kindness and longsuffering to the persons of the evil and unthankful, as he doth, so to be zealous against their sins, according to our calling, as he shews himself to be; and then most especially when he clothes himself with it.

See what God says of Phinehas, Num. xxv. 11, because he was 'zealous with my jealousy;' so out of the original interpreters read it, though we translate it, 'for my sake,' that is, he was affected as God was at the unclean act; yea, and this is the speediest way to abate his zeal. When he shall see us take his part here below, and begin to be hot and valiant for his truth, he thinks then that he may be quiet, and so his wrath slacks, as it did there. Though men grow the more furious in such a case, when they see others back them and second them, yet God doth not. And if we in our places, and our rulers in theirs, would strike through the loins of sinners: we with reproofs nailing their souls to hell, and they with the execution of laws; and do it with God's zeal, as Phinehas did, that is, with grief and indignation that God is so dishonoured, for of those two affections is zeal a compound, Mark iii. 5, as appears by Christ there. God, he should not need to be furious. 'Phinehas,' saith he, 'hath turned away my wrath, whilst he was zealous with my zeal amongst them,' Num. xxv. 11. However, if you be so, yet with you God will make a covenant, as with Phinehas there, that he and his posterity should continue, as they did in all the evils and troubles that befell the nation of the Jews till Christ's time, and rubbed through the Babylonish captivity and all. Ezra was of his race, Ezra vii. 1, 5, and fared and scaped as well then as any other.

And though we have not such public callings and spirits as he then, yet so far as our commission reacheth, let us exercise and shew the like to the full : thrust javelins through men's hearts by reproofs, reform our families, and those we have authority over, and contend with all the world by keeping the law, as Solomon speaks, Prov. xxviii. 4 ; putting iniquity far from our tabernacle, as they exhort, Job xxii. 23, with this promise, ver. 29, ' When others are cast down, thou shalt say there is lifting up.' God will remember thee, as good Nehemiah prays in his last chapter, for thy zeal for God.

But above all, my brethren, be now ' zealous of good works,' as the apostle speaks, Titus ii. 14. Greedy devourers of all the duties of new obedience, abounding more in all the fruits and works of righteousness, you that have ' wrought his judgments,' says the prophet here, ' seek righteousness ;' that is, still and more than ever. Whatever part of righteousness you before were conscionable in, set upon it afresh, as if you had done nothing yet. Mend your pace, they are not hours to stand still in. After John in the Revelation had declared what terrible things were to come on the world, the use he makes in the conclusion is, that the ' righteous be more righteous.'

To bring in some particulars, still enforcing them upon the same ground.

You that have searched your hearts heretofore, search and search again ; it is the exhortation in the text, enforced with this motive, ver. 12 of the first chapter ; for God comes to ' search Jerusalem with candles, when he comes to punish.' Prevent God's searching. If a man can dress and search a wound himself, it is less pain to him than to have the gentlest chirurgeon.

You that have watched over your corrupt hearts and dispositions afore, do it now more than ever. It is Christ's motive against such times as these : Luke xxi. 34, 36, ' Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged' and overrun with any sorts of lusts ; but ' watch therefore and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass,' ver. 36. In Rev. xvi., when the sixth vial is poured out, and that great and last battle is fought wherein antichrist is to be destroyed, before that great overthrow under the seventh, there is a *caveat* given which personally may and doth, for aught I know, concern men living in this age (and it is put in by way of parenthesis) : ' Blessed is he that watcheth, and keeps his garments,' that watcheth over corruptions, suffers not them, as the tares, to grow whilst he sleeps ; that watcheth and suffers not graces and the flame of them to die, as the virgins did whilst they slept.

You that have been fruitful in good speeches and heavenly thoughts, out of the abundance of which the mouth speaks, be more fruitful, Mal. iii. 16-18 verses, and beginning of the 4th chapter compared. Who were they that were spared in the day when the wrath of God ' burnt as an oven,' others as stubble, as in the beginning of the 4th chapter, but they that spake of it one to another in evil times before, and that ' thought upon his name' ? ver. 16. ' Then,' &c. You may see what times they were in the verses before : ' Them' (says God) ' I will spare, as a man spares his son.' You that have thought much of him before, he will then think of you, and then you shall ' discern between the righteous and the wicked ;' a great and a broad difference God will then put.

You that have sanctified the Sabbath strictly, and sought God upon your fast-days diligently, and made conscience of humbling yourselves thoroughly,

do so still ; for see what comfortable promises you lay up for yourselves and your posterity against the evil day, Isa. lviii., where he exhorts to a thorough observation of both : at ver. 11, ' God shall guide thee continually,' and in evil times a man had need of God's guidance, to lead and dispose of him into ways and places, and conditions of safety and deliverance, which all the wit of the world cannot do ; and ' he shall satisfy thy soul in drought,' when all comforts without fail, as you know not how soon they will ; ' and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and a spring of water whose waters fail not.' And at ver. 12, ' Thy posterity shall build the old waste places,' that is, the desolations of the church ; which suppose it be not done in thy days, yet thy children happily shall be great master builders of it for time to come, and thy prayers put up at such times shall lay a foundation for a settled condition of the church for many generations, as our martyrs did of ours by their prayers and sufferings.

And all this promise is made to strict sanctifying of fasts and of the Sabbath day, which are called Sabbaths, because to be kept holy as Sabbaths are ; so in the verses before and after, ver. 13. And if fasts are to be kept so strictly, then Sabbath as strictly, for that is the *regula* and *primum in isto genere*, as appears by the fourth commandment, ' Keep holy the seventh day,' that is, *primum*, and therefore *regula reliquorum*, and so is to be kept as strictly as fasts are. Though indeed thanksgiving is more to abound in the one, humiliation in the other, yet not to speak our own words, or take our own pleasure, &c., in both. For equal it was, that if they kept not the Sabbath, the land should not keep her inhabitants, Lev. xxvi. 34, 35, and they instead of resting should then find trouble ; whereas, Jer. xvii. 24, 25, if they would not profane it, God says, the ' city should stand for ever.'

Be exceeding conversant with the word of God, in reading, meditating, and applying it to your hearts ; get as much of the engrafted word into your hearts, turned and digested into pure grace and strength, and likeness thereunto ; pray it as much into your hearts aforehand as ever you can, there may come a dear year of it all the world over, you know not how soon ; therefore as the angel said to Elijah, Eat again and again, for you may have a long while for to go in the strength of what you get now beforehand. ' Let the word dwell richly in you,' as Col. iii. 16 ; furnish yourselves with as much of that precious treasure as you can, for a little money will not carry you through a long journey, but will soon be spent. Only trust it not in the purses of your memories or brains, but lay it up in your hearts, and believe it, brethren, you cannot be robbed of it.

Acquaint yourselves much with it, and be familiarly conversant in it now, as God commands in Deut. vi. 7, ' And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy brethren, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house,' &c. ; and answerably it will be a constant and familiar companion with thee, and be familiar to thee in all the evils that thou shalt meet withal. Prov. vi. 22, ' When thou goest it shall lead thee,' and guide thee into the ways of peace and safety ; ' when thou sleepest,' and art in any danger, ' it shall keep' and preserve thee ; and ' when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee, be familiar to thee, yea, and in all distresses comfort thee. Ps. cxix. 92, David vows he had perished long ere this, if God's law had not been his delight. And all outward evils will but make it the sweeter : 1 Thes. i. 6, ' They received the word in much affliction, with joy of the of the Holy Ghost.'

Yea, and this will be an argument and motive to God to spare thee,

when he cuts off others; and so Jeremiah useth it, chap. xv. verses 15, 16, among other motives why God should not take him away, but remember him, ver. 15, as in the 11th verse he promiseth to do: 'Thy words,' saith he, 'were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' And so in Job xxii. 22 and 29 compared, 'Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart;' and among other promises in the 25th verse, &c., this is one at the 29th, 'When men are cast down thou shalt say, There is lifting up,' namely, for thee. Because Josiah had a melting heart at the reading the law, therefore God brought it not in his days, 2 Kings xxii. 11, 19.

Do as much as thou canst to others, and use all the abilities and opportunities God hath put into thy hand to the utmost advantage to do good to men's souls. Heb. x. 25, 'Exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.' Those especially that are near to thee, by getting them into Christ before the evil day comes and cuts them off in their sins, warning them to 'save themselves from this froward generation,' in Acts ii., that is the common destruction and general desolation that will befall this generation if we turn not; especially your children, kindred, friends: Gen. xix. 12, 14, when Sodom was to be destroyed, said the angel to Lot, 'Hast thou here any besides, sons-in-law, &c.? And Lot went up and spake to his sons in law,' &c., but he seemed as if he had mocked; though it took no effect, yet therein he discharged his duty.

If thou canst but get thy friends or any of thy children into Christ, then thou needst be no more solicitous for them, for God is bound to take care for them, and will do; come what times will come, they are well enough then.

Do good also with thy estate, to the bodies of men, especially the saints, and for the propagation of the gospel and good of the church. It is a thing I find enforced by Solomon upon this very ground also: Eccles. xi. 1, 2, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, give a portion to seven and also to eight, for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth;' he exhorts to this, you see, in evil times, and the motive is rational and strong, if we take in that also in the former verse, that in 'many days he shall find it;' and that he that doth good with his substance 'lends to the Lord,' Prov. xix. 17.

For, first, then he disposeth it himself, whereas otherwise the enemy that comes and takes all away may be his executor, for aught he knows.

Secondly, He gives it to the Lord, that gave him it at first, and he had better, and shall have more comfort that *he* hath his goods than *they*.

But, thirdly, he doth not give it or cast it away, as yet in the first words Solomon speaks to shew what freeness should be in the donor, but he lends it to the Lord, who after many days will return it again; and that when evil times come, when thou shalt have most need of it, and thou hast not men's bonds for it, but God's also, who is their surety.

To conclude, therefore, this part of the exhortation, to abound in all these and the like practices of righteousness of what kind soever. With these general considerations to quicken you thereto,—

Work as hard as you can whilst you may. For,

First, Believe it, there is nothing here in this world desirable but to have ability, opportunity, and a heart to do God service. Eccles. iii. 12, 'There is no good in them,' speaking of all things here below, 'but for a man to rejoice and to do good in his life.'

Secondly, Consider that every one of you have some work to do. You

are some way to be profitable to God and men, in the duties of your calling and talents committed to you, and duties of religion; and all this work is to be done whilst it is day: John ix. 4, 'I must work the work God sent me to do whilst it is day.' God appointed his own Son work, and this made him abundant in it, because he could work only whilst it was day. God had bespoke a great deal of work, and but a little time allotted for it; therefore our Saviour hastened the more to get it done before candle-light; he that made the first day, and was Lord of time, must yet take this opportunity. Now there was an 'hour of darkness a-coming, as he tells the Pharisees, Luke xxii. 53, when they attacked him first; 'this is your hour and the power of darkness,' when they were to do their works; and so Christ must cease to do his. Now that which was Christ's case is ours also; 'for when the night comes,' says he in the next words, 'no man can work:' as Ps. civ. 23, 'Man goeth forth unto his work, and to his labour, *until the evening*;' for then the beasts go forth to raven, as there.

Now, thirdly, besides that, death seizeth upon all. Years of darkness, 'and those many,' as Solomon says, Eccles. xi. 8; there are hours of darkness to the church of God, when the enemies thereof, as the Pharisees of old, have the power in their hands; so as then no man can work, or if he doth but a little, as in the days of popery, when no man might buy or sell that would not receive the mark of the beast, Rev. xiii. 17; and it is to be feared, that there is yet an hour of temptation, and the power of darkness a-coming over the world, as some interpret that place, Rev. iii. 10, when the witnesses shall be slain, Rev. xi. Popery may have a reviving, as heathenism had after Constantine's reformation, in Julian's time, sixty years after, and then it will prove a time of suffering rather than doing; your shop-windows will then be shut, the night may come when none can work, or if they do, do only work within doors; for your hearts may pray, let the enemies do what they will or can. Therefore let us now bestir ourselves, and do good whilst we have time (as the apostle's exhortation is, Gal. vi. 10), and indeed opportunity. The devil, the shorter time he thinks he hath, indeed rageth the more, Rev. xii. 12. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri*, learn this of your enemy: 1 Cor. vii. 29, speaking of times of persecution, as appears by the 26th verse, 'Brethren,' says he, 'the time is short, therefore use the world as if you used it not,' for you know not how long time you have to enjoy it. Like travellers, if they fear night draws on, they put spurs to their horse and ride away the faster, so do you.

But, fourthly, consider that you may be cut off among others; the best may. Now 'in the grave there is no work,' says Solomon, Eccles. ix. 10, and therefore do what thou dost with all thy might; and as speedily rid as much work as thou canst. It will grieve you to die and to have brought no more glory to God, to have sowed no more seed to the Spirit, which you may reap in heaven; to be hewn down with so many leaves and little fruit, and that not ripe, many buds of good purposes of being more zealous scarce brought into act.

Therefore fall to work and bestir yourselves; if you die, how can you die better than so doing? 'Blessed is he whom his Master finds so doing.' This will make you ripe and loaden with ears against the sickle comes; and when you have done your work, you may say with Paul, 'I have finished my course;' no matter if you be cut off, you then will glorify God in your deaths, and be vessels prepared for glory, as saints are, Rom. ix. 23. As, therefore, good housewives scour and make bright their ves-

sels against some great day, so do you against the day of the Lord. That you may be 'meet,' as the phrase is, Col. i. 12, 'to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light,' as therefore Peter exhorts, 2 Pet. i. from 5 to 12th, add grace to grace, and abound too, 'so shall you make your election sure;' and when you come to die, 'abundant entrance will be made into the kingdom of Jesus Christ;' you shall not scarcely be saved, creep through a narrow hole, have much ado, but a large way, an abundant entrance, shall be opened unto you.

The last thing is to seek meekness, which is a contentedness to be disposed of by God, either in doing or suffering his will, without murmuring or repining; such as was seen in old Eli, in 1 Sam. iii. 18, and in the church when under the greatest and sorest pressures, Lament. iii. 26-31, and expressed there by quiet waiting, bearing the yoke, sitting alone; a meek person is silent, hath his mouth stopped, nothing to complain of, because 'he hath laid it' (as others read it) 'upon him;' going alone to meditate of and mourn for his sins, put his mouth in the dust, and gives his cheek to him that reproacheth him, takes it patiently, and as it is Levit. xxvi. 41, 'accept his punishment,' which is also joined with a constant cleaving to God, notwithstanding all he has laid on him, as the church: Ps. xlv. 17 to the 20th, 'All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death. If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange God.' They forsook him not, nor did deal falsely in his covenant, 'though thou hast sore broken us,' &c.

And this disposition ariseth out of two things.

First, A thorough conviction of a man's sins, and the offence to God in them, and obnoxiousness and deservedness to be destroyed for them. So the church, Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him;' and the church in Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore,' says she, 'should a man complain or murmur for the punishment of his sins?' as being a most absurd and uncomely thing, that a man that is so obnoxious should think much to be corrected; as if a thief that deserved hanging should complain of being burned in the hand. Especially when one considers, as Ezra ix. 13, that 'God punisheth less than a man deserves.'

Secondly, So far as this is joined also with hope of mercy, for otherwise a man's soul flies in God's face, as did Cain, and thinks out of self-love (if not subdued by the love of God in the heart) the punishment too great, and more than he can bear; therefore in the fore-named places, Lam. iii. 26, hope is still joined with quiet waiting; yea, and in the 29th, made a condition pre-requisite, he 'puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope,' otherwise not. This makes him quiet, and for a while content, that (as it is ver. 31) 'God will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet he will have mercy according to the multitude of them.'

And this disposition of contentedness to suffer thus arising, is it which God requires especially of all graces to abound in us at times of judgment; and therefore, speaking to his people here, his compellation is, 'Ye meek of the earth,' and his exhortation, 'Seek meekness,' this appellation, suiting so well with the matter he had in hand, threatening a day of anger. As therefore, when we speak to God, we usually call upon him as the God of that grace we sue for. If we ask wisdom of him, we look and call upon him by the name of 'Father of lights;' if consolation, 'the God of all

comfort.' So when God speaks to us, he gives us that especial appellation, and denominates us by that grace (as here of meek ones) which best becomes us in receiving the message he is delivering.

And when God speaks of a 'day of anger,' and of his 'fierce anger' a-coming, it becomes us, who are obnoxious as well as others, to be meek, and silent, and still. Then, 'seek meekness;' not to entertain a murmuring thought to the contrary; for it is the most absurd and unseemly thing to see one that deserves to be in hell, and have the lowest place there, to complain of lesser punishments; and therefore, Lam. iii. 39, Jeremiah brings it in as a most unreasonable thing to be wondered at, 'Why doth an evil man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' He wonders that a man obnoxious to God in so great a guilt; what! that he should complain of punishment, of punishment of his sins? betwixt which there is no proportion. A rogue that deserves hanging, drawing, and quartering, complain if he be sentenced but to whipping or burning in the hand! Down on thy knees, wretch, and thank the Judge for his mercy that thou art 'not consumed' (as they, ver. 22 of the same chapter), as infinite mercy by which thou escapest. Be content to welcome that punishment which is less than thou hast deserved. If any had cause to complain, Christ had, who was innocent; and innocency makes men speak when guilt would stop their mouths; but 'as a lamb led to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth;' prayed indeed the cup might pass, but yet 'if possible,' else not; 'Not my will, Father, but thine;' and 'he was heard in what he feared.' So do thou. The promise of hiding is made to it; if there be any hiding-place to be found on earth, a meek man may challenge it: Ps. xxxvii. 8, 'The meek shall inherit the earth;' and therefore they are here called the 'meek of the earth, and the 'inhabitants of the earth,' Isa. xxvi. 9.

And the reason why God so especially regards this disposition, and makes a promise against ill times to it, and spares them, is,

First, Because God desires but to overcome when he comes to judge, Rom. iii. 4; to have the victory over men. Now, a spirit that confessing it hath sinned willingly submits to and accepts its punishment: over that spirit God is acknowledged a victor already. And it is not a fit match for him to shew his power on; but a Pharaoh that will not stoop, he will shew his power on him to choose and break him in pieces. You whip your children but till they kiss the rod, and then you fling it away.

Secondly, A meek soul will still be thankful to him, and give him all the glory, let him deal with it how he will, and he doth desire no more, apprehending itself worthy to be destroyed. It magnifies the least mercies in the midst of judgments, and still thinks judgments small, confessing God just and merciful in them, if its being be but preserved: 'It is of thy mercy we are not consumed,' Lam. iii. 22; and 'Great is thy faithfulness.' So Ezra ix. 13, he there aggravates his sin: 'All this is come upon us for our great trespass;' but extenuates and thinks nothing of the punishment: 'Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities;' but he magnifies the least mercy: 'hast given us such a deliverance as this,' sets an emphasis on that.

Thirdly, A meek soul will not forsake God, but serve and obey him still, let God do what he will with it: Ps. xlii. 17, 18, 'All this is come upon us; yet we have not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us.' For a meek heart still

knows that obedience is due, that imprisonment satisfies not for the debt. Now, such a soul therefore God cannot find in his heart long to punish, and therefore the promise is made to them.

Now, to exhort to this, consider but this one motive, that besides that a man is obnoxious, God also hath an unlimited prerogative to bring on thee what he will. And if he will bring a judgment on thee, all the world cannot hinder it nor take it off. So as there is no dealing with him, but submitting; for he keeps prosperity and adversity under lock and key, and shuts and none can open; men must lie close prisoners till he will let them out, Job xii. 14. It is Job's expression in this very case: 'Behold, he breaketh down, and none can build up; he shuts up a man, and there can be no opening,' and so on to the end of that chapter. And upon this ground see what counsel Elihu gives, Job xxxiv. 29-31, he having the prerogative to 'give quietness,' so as then 'none can give trouble;' and when he 'hides his face, who can behold him?' whether it be done against a man; and not only so, but a whole nation. They cannot all keep an affliction off, nor all the world cannot hurt them, if he will give quietness. If he will set an hypocrite over them to ensnare them, they cannot all get him down till he will, ver. 30. And what then? 'Surely it is meet to be said, I have borne chastisement, and I will not offend any more.' No way but to kiss the rod and say, 'I will do so no more.' And if a man sees not cause why God should thus chastise him, and so be apt to repine, yet let him think there is a cause; therefore in verse 32, 'That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more.'

And to say as Jeremiah upon the like occasion, or the church in his person, Jer. x. 22-24, when there was the noise of the bruit of an invasion from the north, to make the cities desolate, what say they? Ver. 23, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,' whether he shall have fair way or foul to walk; neither do I know whither to run for safety; my life and all is in thy hands; therefore 'O Lord, correct me, but with judgment.' The church is willing in such a case to be whipped, only desires God to deal gently with her; and so must we.